

THE MEXICAN EXPEDITIONARY AIR FORCE IN WORLD
WAR II: THE ORGANIZATION, TRAINING, AND
OPERATIONS OF THE 201st SQUADRON

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Preface

The Mexican Expeditionary Air Force is Mexico's only military organization that saw combat overseas in World War II. This organization and its operational unit—the 201st Squadron—were part of the Allied forces that battled against the Axis in the South West Pacific Area. However, there are few history works that mention the participation of this unit. Hence, the history of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force is not well known. In this research paper, I explain some aspects related to the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force, concentrating on the organization, training, and operations of the 201st Fighter Squadron. I consider that there are valuable and very important lessons to learn from this experience.

I want to acknowledge the guidance and assistance from my research advisor, Dr. Richard R. Muller, who suggested the topic, and helped me to focus my research and my writing. I also want to acknowledge the insights provided by Captain Amadeo Castro Almanza—a 201st Fighter Squadron flight-leader in combat missions—and Lieutenant Charles H. Volz Jr., an instructor of Mexican pilots in 1945 at Napier Field, Alabama. My thanks to the librarians and staff at the Historical Research Agency in Maxwell Air Force Base for their invaluable support. My appreciation, finally, to Don Humberto Gamboa Montoya, who served as a Sergeant in the 201st Squadron, and later became a mathematics teacher in my hometown—Mazatlán, Sinaloa. Thanks to him I first learned about the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force in World War II.

Abstract

The Mexican Expeditionary Air Force was part of the Allied forces in the South West Pacific Area in World War II. Its operational unit—the 201st Squadron—was organized, trained, and equipped with the P-47 aircraft. This is Mexico’s only unit that conducted combat operations overseas. This research paper analyzes the organization, training, and operations of the 201st Fighter Squadron, as the basis for assessing its performance and explain the significance of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force.

The main source of this research is Lieutenant Colonel Enrique Sandoval Castarrica’s *“Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana.”* Most of the support for the unit’s history and operations data comes from original documents found in the Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. It includes insights of participants in the training conducted in the US and the operations of this unit in the Philippines and Formosa.

This research paper clarifies some aspects of the operational performance and contributions of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force. It shows how with many limitations and at a relatively low cost, the 201st Squadron was able to succeed in its combat missions in the South West Pacific Area.

Chapter 1

Introduction

*México, al adherirse a la causa de las Naciones Unidas, expresó la firme resolución de coadyuvar por todos los medios posibles a la victoria final de las democracias, aceptando conscientemente las altas responsabilidades que un pueblo libre debe asumir, cuando se ven en peligro, junto con el prestigio de su soberanía, los ideales que norman su existencia y que son base de sus instituciones, honra de su pasado, preocupación intensa de su presente y garantía eficaz de su porvenir.**

—President Manuel Avila Camacho

Mexico's participation in the Second World War against the Axis powers is seldom mentioned in history books. In the few works that acknowledge Mexico's participation, the support with raw materials and labor force to the Allied war effort receives considerably more attention than the actual contribution in combat. This relationship reflects the perceived overall contribution of the country to the Allied cause in World War II, but unfortunately, adds to the lack of information about Mexico's only unit participating in combat overseas—the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (MEAF).

The MEAF was part of the Allied forces in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) in World War II. The organization of its operational unit—the 201st Fighter Squadron—was mostly the result of coordination in the Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission (JMUSDC). The 201st Squadron, through Lend-Lease Agreement, trained in the United States from August 1944 to March 1945 and was equipped to conduct

combat operations. The preparation of the MEAF culminated with its successful employment in the SWPA from June to August 1945. This research paper analyzes the organization, training, and operations of the 201st Squadron, and clarifies some aspects of the operational performance and contributions of the MEAF.

The participation of the MEAF in World War II, was not an ordinary accomplishment; especially if we consider that this was the first occasion that Mexico's government sent forces to fight outside of the country's territory. To understand the significance of Mexico's decision to send forces overseas, it is necessary to briefly review the country's history and the impact of the Second World War.



Figure 1. Mexican pilots and P-47 aircraft in the SWPA

The Traditional Position of Mexico

A recurrent event in Mexico's history is the country defending against acts of external aggression. After Mexico's independence in 1821, the country was invaded several times, lost more than half its territory, and suffered foreign intervention repeatedly. Reparation for war damages on foreign nationals' property was used on many occasions as justification for military action against Mexico.

The last cases of military intervention happened during the Mexican Revolution. From April to November 1914 US forces occupied Veracruz in the Gulf of Mexico, to deny European support to Victoriano Huerta. World War I started on August 1914. In March 1916, US forces initiated the Punitive Expedition against Francisco Villa—the outlaw who attacked Columbus, New Mexico. The people and government of Mexico opposed both interventions, always recurring to law and international support.

The relations of Mexico and the US remained tense during most of World War I, until the withdrawal of the US troops. The last formation of the retreating US forces reached the border on February 5, 1917, the same day of the promulgation of the actual Constitution of Mexico.¹ This is the legal foundation of the Mexican Armed Forces, and signals the initial step in the professionalization of the Mexican military.

The single person that most contributed to both the US forces leaving Mexico and the promulgation of the Constitution was Don Venustiano Carranza. The Mexican principles of international politics, also known as Estrada Doctrine, are basically a continuation of the posture adopted by Carranza, who solved an international conflict through law, not force. The essence of this doctrine is Mexico's freedom, sovereignty, independence, and equality to all countries of the world before International Law.²

Hence, the country's history and international posture made appear the participation of Mexican forces overseas almost impossible. The events brought by World War II showed differently.

Mexico and the Second World War

World War II changed in many ways Mexico's international relations. World War II was a total war, and its economic aspects included the cooperation of countries distant from the battlefields. The Allied nations, the US in particular, increased efforts to align on its side the Latin American countries, reducing the influence of the Axis powers in the continent. The US's "Good Neighbor" policy and the inclination of Mexico to support the cause of democracies, were probably the main reasons for greater cooperation among the two countries.

Mexico's traditional opposition to imperialism contributed to the country's antagonism against totalitarian governments. Before the war, Mexico participated in the economic blockade to Italy after the annexation of Ethiopia in 1935. Later, Mexico maintained recognition to legitimate governments in exile after the military occupation of their countries. Mexico also supported the Republicans in Spain. Those actions manifested Mexico's commitment to the cause of Democracies.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Mexico broke relations with the Axis powers, adopted defensive measures, and increased cooperation with the US. Mexico and the US continued negotiations and both countries reached political, economic, and military agreements to ensure cooperation. One of these agreements was the creation of the Joint

Mexican-United States Defense Commission (JMUSSDC) for coordination of military concerns.³

Support to Allied nations was not limited to greater cooperation with the US. Mexico also resumed relations with Great Britain in October 1941. Both countries had exchanged notes and suspended diplomatic relations after Mexico nationalized its oil industry in March 1938. The Second World War helped to solve this conflict.⁴

The enlargement of the theater of war after Pearl Harbor reached Mexico. German U-boats expanded their area of operations after December 1941, to include the Atlantic coast of the US and the Gulf of Mexico.⁵ Two Mexican oil ships sank after submarine attacks in May 1942. This caused Mexico's declaration of war against the Axis Powers.

After Mexico entered the war, the country increased defensive measures and cooperation with the US. The obligatory military service, civil defense, and the creation of a Supreme Council of National Defense were some of the actions of Mexico.⁶ The Mexican Army deployed in the Pacific Military Region to defend the Mexican territory from Axis forces, while the US counterpart defended north of the border. This cooperation, based on mutual respect, was a completely new relationship, in contrast to the complicated and tense situation during World War I.

The participation of the Mexican military was not limited to territorial defense. The Navy and the Air Force patrolled the coast of Mexico on antisubmarine missions.⁷ The latter also participated in combat with a military force overseas. It was the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force with the 201st Squadron; a small unit representing the Mexican military. This was something new for Mexico, and it required the organization of a capable unit.

Notes

^{1*} Mexico, upon joining the United Nations' cause, expressed its firm resolution to help with all possible means to the final victory of democracies, consciously accepting the high responsibilities that a free nation must assume, when seen endangered, together with the prestige of its sovereignty, the ideals that norm its existence and are the base of its institutions, honor of its past, intense preoccupation of its present and effective guaranty of its future.

¹Ing. Jesus Carranza Castro, *Origen, Destino y Legado de Carranza*, 2 vols. (México: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1995), 347.

²Ibid., 426.

³Mathewson, Lt Col L., Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commision, Washington. Memorandum. To Commanding General, Army Air Forces. Subject: Progress Report of the Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission, 24 April 1942.

⁴Mexico's oil expropriation was an act of sovereignty and based on law. Great Britain felt that it affected hardly its interests, and even in 1942 considered that the "oil dispute stills remains unsettled." "Mexico," *British Air Ministry Weekly Intelligence Summary*, No. 143 (27 May 1942): 27.

⁵John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1990), 107.

⁶Angel Miranda Basurto, *La Evolución de México* (México 5, D.F.: Ediciones Numancia S.A., 1989), 352.

⁷On 5 July 1942, the MAF Major Luis Noriega Medrano launched from Tuxpan, Veracruz on an AT-6 to patrol the Gulf of Mexico. He discovered and engaged an U-129 German submarine, which the pilot reported as damaged from the attack with 100 lb. GP bombs. Hector Dávila Cornejo, *Historia Gráfica de la Fuerza Aérea Mexicana* (México, D.F.: Estrategia Aeronáutica e Industrial S.A. de C.V., 1995), 36.

Chapter 2

Organizational Development

Whereas to shift the weight of effort on the ground from one point to another takes time, the flexibility inherent in Air Forces permits them without change of base to be switched from one objective to another in the theater of operations.

—Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery

Mexico's declaration of war against the Axis powers demanded hostile action against the adversary. Mexico wanted to participate, together with Allied forces, with a small but significant military organization. An aerial unit offered the best option for the employment of an effective Mexican force overseas.¹ Different considerations helped this decision.

Status of Mexican Aviation before World War II

Aviation in Mexico developed as a component of military forces during the Mexican Revolution. The first military exercise in Mexico that included employment of an aircraft took place in February 1911. The exercise consisted in the reconnaissance of an area near Mexico city, to locate and bomb (with oranges) a hidden artillery battery.² Aviation became a part of the forces fighting the revolution, and probably the first aerial engagement and air to surface attack occurred in Mexican territory.

The origins of the Mexican Air Force (MAF) go back to Carranza's forces. The Constitutionalist Army's Aviation branch was created on February 5, 1915. The same

year, on November 15, the National Shops of Aeronautical Constructions and the National School of Aviation were born. These organizations evolved, changing name and location several times, and were the main source of technicians and pilots when Mexico entered the war.

The training of Mexican pilots was a responsibility of the Military Aviation School. Many generations of pilots graduated from this school, which had moved recently to a new Base built in 1941. When Mexico declared war on the Axis powers the requirements for trained personnel increased significantly, and the school became insufficient. In 1944 the school had 18 instructors and over 500 students. The MAF had 425 officers (225 pilots) and 1,350 enlisted men.³

The Mexican Army used different types of aircraft, for the training of pilots and for its operational needs. Most of the equipment was obsolete when Mexico entered the war. In July 31, 1942, in addition to a variety of biplanes and one Ryan STM-150, there were on service a dozen Vought OS2U-3 Kingfisher and North American AT-6 Texan, received earlier that year.⁴ Civilian aviation did not offer a great amount of additional means to solve problems created by the war; so, a growth and modernization program started.

Mexico increased its military power significantly after the country entered the war. The US Lend-Lease Law permitted agreements to obtain material and ammunitions. Air power increased significantly in comparison to the status prior to the war. In 1944 Mexico's military aviation included 70 AT-6, 24 AT-11, and 30 A-24B dive bombers.⁵ The Aviation Department received the official name Mexican Air Force on February 10, 1944. The following month, the President of Mexico made known that if Mexican forces

were to participate in combat, it would be the MAF personnel who would be representing the country's military.

Probably different reasons contributed to the decision of sending Aviation personnel to war. They could have been among others: the language knowledge, previous experience, and the nature of training. Most pilots and maintenance personnel had some knowledge of the English language; this reduced the problem of communication with Allied forces. Also, some pilots had already received flight training in the US Army Air Corps and Navy.⁶ Finally, a relatively high amount of training would be of technical nature, benefiting the modernization effort of the Mexican military. The implementation of this decision required thorough coordination.

The Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission

The Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission (JMUSDC) was the primary mechanism for coordination of the US and Mexican military. It was constituted on February 1942, to coordinate actions related to the common defense of both countries. Most of the initial coordination took place in Washington, D.C., and the head of the Mexican part was Mexico's Military Attaché, Brigadier General Luis Alamillo Flores. The agenda of the JMUSDC included a program to coordinate activities of the Mexican Pacific Military Region and the US Western Defense Command and Western Sea Frontier Command.⁷ It also contemplated advance training in US schools.⁸

The JMUSDC also handled the military part of Lend-Lease to Mexico. According to one author the Mexican Army received equipment, including tanks and airplanes, for about \$18,000,000 to pay at a discount price. By 1949 Mexico had paid the \$6,000,000

price set on the equipment.⁹ The Lend-Lease agreement covered the cost of the program related to the training and equipment of the MEAF, whose organization was discussed in the JMUSDC.¹⁰

The organization of an aerial unit to be employed in combat overseas, representing the Mexican military, offered many advantages for both countries. Operational and tactical considerations favored such an organization. An aerial unit would be able to concentrate the military power of a small unit against different objectives in the Theater of Operations, in contrast with the requirement for a larger ground force deployed in the front. Strategic considerations also supported this type of organization. An aerial unit could better seek combat with a retreating adversary force, which was the overall war situation since 1942.

Many other aspects indicated that the best option for a military force overseas was an Air Force unit. One important consideration was that there would be a lower number of people participating in training in the US and in the operations overseas. This reduced the chances of incidents that could affect the program, and contributed to reduce the expected amount of casualties, which combat experience showed were higher for ground forces. In addition, there was the experience in the US of the organization and training of a Brazilian aerial unit that fought in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

The coordination resulted in the organization of a Mexican Squadron, which later became the operational unit of the MEAF. As a result of this coordination, on July 1944 Mexico organized a group to receive advanced training in the US. The group developed around the MAF's existing 201st Air Squadron, augmented with personnel selected from different Army and Air Force organizations.¹¹

Organization and proficiency were key considerations during the organization of the Squadron. The unit's organization was to be the same as a P-47 squadron in the United States Army Air Forces, in accordance to the corresponding Tables of Organization. The required Standards of Proficiency were identical to those of the same type of unit in the US.¹² These considerations guided the planning of the training and the requirements of the trainees for the ground and flight echelons.

Coordination in the JMUSDC allowed agreement on a training plan for the Fighter Squadron, presented on July 10, 1944.¹³ The plan considered approximately 42 officers and 249 enlisted men, most of them fluent in English if possible, to arrive to Randolph Field, TX, not later than July 25, 1944. Training included three broad areas:

1. Individual training. During five weeks on different bases, starting August 1, 1944.
2. Unit training. For two months on Pocatello Air Base, Idaho, from September 10 to November 10, 1944. In P-47 aircraft, under supervision of Commanding General 2nd Air Force, and according to Standard 10-1-1.
3. Replacement training. If necessary, to start four months prior to the date required.

After January 1945, when the governments of Mexico and the US reached an agreement regarding the participation of the Mexican Squadron overseas, the JMUSDC also coordinated details for the employment of the force. The agreement established the participation of the Mexican Squadron, accompanied by a senior officer and a small staff group. The Squadron and adjutant personnel were to be handled as an integral part of the US Army, with exceptions in the Command, Administration, Expenses, and Equipment and Supply.¹⁴ Appendix A is a transcription of the agreement.

The Command and Control coordination are particularly important due to the terms of the Agreement. The Commander of the Squadron had been a Mexican Colonel, and it did not represent any problem during training. However, the Mexican Congress approval

for the participation of a force overseas and the terms of the agreement with the US government for such participation, required changes.

The regular Command line for a US P-47 Squadron, normally commanded by a Major or Captain, was a Fighter Group headed usually by a Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel. The rank of the Commander of the 201st Squadron was higher than usual, a normal designation for independent forces, but unnecessary for the agreed structure. Since the Squadron would be operating under tactical tasking from a US Fighter Group, it was necessary to appoint a new Commander. A Mexican officer, qualified to command in accordance with the standards applied for selection of a commander for a Fighter Squadron in the US Army, was to be in command of the Squadron. As a result, Captain Radamés Gaxiola Andrade was appointed for this position after the creation of the MEAF.¹⁵

The Mexican government, given the importance that this force represented for Mexico and in accordance to the nature of its mission, created the MEAF. This organization was the Squadron's superior unit overseas, except in tactical tasking. The commander of the MEAF was the senior Mexican officer accompanying the Squadron, and he represented the Mexican Army in matters pertaining the Squadron. The Mexican government appointed for this position to Col Antonio Cárdenas Rodríguez, the previous Commander of the 201st Squadron. His responsibility included to further the administrative efficiency of the MEAF, and foster good relations with other United Nations troops. He disposed of a small staff group to assist the training and operations of the 201st Squadron.

Col Cárdenas received instructions from Mexico's Secretary of Defense on March 1945, regarding the MEAF mission performance overseas.¹⁶ They contemplated a variety of details, including organization, command, legal and disciplinary aspects, administration, logistics, payment, and communications. These instructions established the organization of the MEAF, which included:

1. Command and Staff.
2. 201st Fighter Squadron.¹⁷
3. Replacements.

The JMUSDC also coordinated the MEAF deployment to the SWPA. The Mexican Government preferred to participate in the liberation of the Philippines, due to the historical and cultural connections among both nations. This decision proved beneficial beyond the combat aspect, since the MEAF personnel also became a “valuable social contact with the Spanish speaking Filipinos.”¹⁸

Notes

¹Teniente Coronel de Estado Mayor Enrique Sandoval Castarrica, *Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana* (México, Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1946), 20.

²Dávila Cornejo, 8.

³Ibid., 19.

⁴Ibid., 24.

⁵Ibid., 24.

⁶Captain Castro—a former 201st Squadron pilot in the SWPA—represents an example of this. He received his pilot wings from the US Navy in 1943, after completion of primary and advanced flying training at Corpus Christi, TX. Captain Amadeo Castro Almanza, telephone interview, 6 March 1997.

⁷Mathewson, Lt Col L., Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission, Washington. Memorandum. To Commanding General, Army Air Forces. Subject: Progress Report of the Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission, 24 April 1942.

⁸Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (New York, N.Y.: Atheneum, originally Harvard University Press, 1968), 277.

⁹Ibid., 277.

¹⁰Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 147-168.

Notes

¹¹Basic English knowledge and prior flight training in the US were the two factors that guided the selection of pilots. “De estos, eran 8 de la Marina y 7 de la U.S.A.F. El resto eran egresados de la E.M.A., para un total de 36 pilotos.” (“From these, they were 8 from the Navy and 7 from the USAF. All other were from the Aviation Military School.” Other sources mention two thirds of pilots with prior instruction in the US). Captain Amadeo Castro Almanza, Fax message, 7 March 1997.

¹²Harper, Maj Gen US Army R.W., Ass’t Chief of Air Staff, Training. To Commanding General, Second Air Force. Letter. Subject: Training of 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 12 September 1944.

¹³Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 37-41.

¹⁴Ibid., 151-154.

¹⁵“Captain Gaxiola was a senior pilot from Mexico City, with many years spent in the United States.” “He had to his credit almost 4,000 hours of flying, largely in United States Army and Navy aircraft.” History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 1 February-18 March 1945, Majors Field, 72nd Fighter Wing, Second Air Force, 28.

¹⁶Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 161-166.

¹⁷These instructions established the operational unit’s name as “Escuadrón de Pelea 201.” However, the official name changed from “Grupo de Perfeccionamiento de Aeronáutica” to “Escuadrón 201,” and finally to “Escuadrón 201 de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana.” Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 23.

¹⁸History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, July 1944-1 September 1945, Research Studies Institute, 6.

Chapter 3

Training and Equipment

Train as you intend to fight, and fight as you trained.

—Principle of training

The training of the MEAF took place in the US and overseas. Activities in the US involved Individual and Unit training. The purpose was to create a force able to operate independently, integrated with the US forces. Adaptation to the US system and procedures was a requirement to permit integration on the battlefield. Training continued after deployment in the Theater of Operations. There were many obstacles in the training, but important lessons were learned.

The Training in the United States

The Mexican group of approximately 300 men entered the US on Laredo, TX, on July 25, 1944. They would become part of the first Mexican military organization to leave the country with a war mission. They arrived to Randolph, TX for initial processing.¹ All personnel took a medical exam, and the pilots also took a flight examination.

Individual training started as early as August 1, 1944. The Squadron divided according to specialties and went to different training centers. The largest groups went to Pocatello, Idaho and the Republic Aviation Corporation in Farmingdale, Long Island,

N.Y. Others went to Boca Ratón, Florida., and Scot Field, IL. Training for the ground echelon consisted basically of instruction in English, basic military subjects, and on the job training in different specialties.² Instructors and trainees worked hard to accomplish the mission. “In the opinion of their instructors, the Mexican maintenance men were demonstrating a commendable seriousness of purpose, initiative, and comprehension.”³

The pilots commenced a refresher training in Foster Field, TX that terminated in October 1944. Twenty seven pilots were needed to fill the Tables of Organization, and the original training plan included eleven replacements. They flew transition, formation, instruments, navigation, night flying, and strafing missions in the AT-6 and P-40 aircraft. Two pilots were considered not apt for the training and returned to Mexico in August 1944, together with six enlisted men eliminated in the medical exam.⁴

After individual training finished, the Squadron concentrated in Pocatello, Idaho for unit training. The purpose of unit training was to create a force able to operate independently. On October 20, 1944, the only absences were the Intelligence Officer and six radar men.⁵ The Squadron received eighteen P-47 aircraft, and organized as shown in Table 1.⁶

The Second Air Force, to assist in the unit’s training, organized Section “I” in Pocatello, Idaho, in August 1944. This organization, commanded by Captain Paul B. Miller, included instructors and interpreters selected for their technical knowledge and ability to speak Spanish.⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Arthur W. Kellond replaced Captain Miller in February 1945, and Section “I” changed to Squadron; it was disbanded in March 1945. Ten members of this unit, including Lt Col Kellond, remained on temporary duty with the 201st Squadron, and accompanied the MEAF overseas.⁸

Table 1. Organization of the 201st Squadron

	Flight Echelon		Ground Echelon	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
Command	3	2	1	6
Medical Service	1	1	0	3
Subsistence (Food)	1	17	0	0
Administrative Supply	1	1	0	3
Transportation	0	0	1	9
Ordnance	1	9	1	19
Communications	1	8	1	24
Engineering / Maintenance	3	8	0	28
Technical Supply	1	1	0	3
Intelligence	2	2	1	1
Operations	3	2	0	3
Flight "A"	6	13	0	12
Flight "B"	7	11	0	11
Flight "C"	6	11	0	11
Flight "D"	6	12	0	11
TOTAL	42	98	5	144

Flying training in the new aircraft started on 22 October 1944 with good results, attributed to the pilots flying experience. They “proved to be well above average as a whole.”⁹ The pilots flew a minimum of three sorties in the Vultee BT-13 aircraft, before flying the P-47. The complete training program was the standard for US pilots, and it included 120 flight hours, in five phases. Appendix B provides more information about the Flying training program.

The pilots soon demonstrated their flying ability, and during the first week, all except one had been “checked out” in the P-47. The Commander of Section “I” proclaimed the Mexican pilots “considerably above average” in judgment, technique, take-off, landings, and in general performance. He also reported on 16 December 1944 that “their formation flying ranged from excellent to superior.”¹⁰

Inclement weather on the winter of 1944 prevented flying activities in Pocatello. The MEAF wanted to be ready to participate in combat, and when weather permitted the 201st Squadron aircraft were the first to be ready to flight. To solve this problem and continue training, the MEAF relocated to Majors Field, TX on November 30, 1944.¹¹ The Mexican Senate authorized the President to send Mexican troops overseas on December 29, 1944.

On February 2, 1945, the pilots were ready to start gunnery training, the final phase of the 201st Squadron training program. The unit moved to Brownsville Army Air Field, TX for this training; but unfortunately, weather continued to be a delaying factor. The higher score for air to air impacts was almost 25 %, and the best results for air to ground strafing were over 30 %.¹² The unit completed gunnery training, and returned to Majors Field, TX on March 14, 1945.

The training of replacement pilots and ground personnel started on February 1945. On March sixteen pilots were flying the refresher course. Ten were almost ready to fly the P-47, and six were about a month behind. Considering the attrition rate, at least nine replacement pilots would be ready on July 28, 1945, and five more a month later. The replacement training plan considered forty-eight more pilots for refresher and P-47 training.¹³ The training, initially conducted at Foster Field, TX, was changed to Napier Field, Alabama, near Maxwell Field. Maxwell was the home of the Air Corps Tactical School, the US center for development of air power tactics and strategy.

After finishing the unit training, the MEAF, which received the Mexican Flag on February 22, 1945, was ready to go overseas.¹⁴ The pilots went to Topeka, Kansas, for final processing by the 21st Bombardment Wing, and the ground personnel left Majors

Field by train on 18 March. The MEAF departed San Francisco, California, onboard the Fairisle on March 27, and arrive to Manila Bay on April 30, 1945.¹⁵

The Training in the Theater of Operations.

The MEAF debarked in the Philippines on May 1, 1945. General George C. Kenney, the Commander of the US Army and Allied Air Forces in the SWPA, wrote about this event in his memoirs:

That afternoon Colonel Cardenas, the commander of the Mexican Expeditionary Force, landed at Manila with the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron. After a reception at the pier I took Cardenas over to see General MacArthur, and after the official exchange of greetings, the Mexicans were officially assigned to my command. They then proceeded to Clark Field, where I turned them over to Brigadier General Freddy Smith with instructions to outfit them with P-47s and give them a course of advanced combat training before putting them into action. Both officers and enlisted men were a fine-looking lot and seem anxious to get to work against the Japs as soon as possible.¹⁶

Colonel Cárdenas with the MEAF personnel established at Fort Stotsenburg in Clark Field, located about 40 NM Northwest of Manila. Some MEAF elements were assigned to the Fifth Fighter Command as Liaison officers. The 201st Squadron established in Porac, in the Clark Field's area, and was attached to the 58th Fighter Group, Fifth Fighter Command, Fifth Air Force, US Far East Air Forces.¹⁷ The unit remained in this situation until its attachment to the 360th Air Service Group (CR&TC) on 11 August 1945; it was assigned to 13th Air Force along with 360th Air Service Group on 1 September 1945.¹⁸

Advanced combat training in theater was a normal procedure for newly arrived replacements, and it involved ground and flight training. The training program for the 201st Squadron established ground training from 7 to 12 May 1945.¹⁹ The initial two days were lectures from V Fighter Command and Fifth Air Force personnel; the rest included

one day of practical demonstrations at the 51st Fighter Sector, and the Ground Pre-Combat Training. The topics of the lectures were:

1. Overall picture on War Fronts
2. SWPA forces
3. Weather in SWPA
4. Fighter Sector orientation
5. Air Sea rescue
6. Escape and evasion
7. Zones of action
8. Friendly ground situation
9. Support Air Party

Flying training started until May 17, due to bad weather the previous days.²⁰ The 201st Squadron used P-47s on loan from the 58th Fighter Group units. Flight training included:

1. Familiarization and orientation
2. Fighter tactics and technics
3. Simulated combat missions
4. Combat missions

Advanced flight training finished on June 3, and the 201st Squadron was ready for combat in the SWPA.²¹ The pilots had started missions integrated to US formations, increasing the number of Mexican pilots until the formation was completely from the 201st Squadron. However, during most operations of the Mexican Squadron one liaison American pilot was included. In addition, the Squadron flew some more training missions in the SWPA, especially in the air to air arena.



The Equipment

The Lend-Lease agreement permitted the Mexican Squadron to use airplanes, equipment, instructors, and training facilities, in the US. It also contemplated the equipment of the unit overseas, in the same manner that an American unit. Initially the unit received in the Philippines used aircraft and other equipment on loan. The 201st Squadron's aircraft had US markings in addition to the Mexican marks, and they also have a white band painted in the nose.²²

The 201st Squadron flew the P-47 aircraft, officially known as Thunderbolt, but nicknamed "Jug" due to its bulky shape that resembled a milk jug. It was a big and heavy airplane, weighting almost 7 tons, but powerful and fast. There were many series of this aircraft, of which 15,682 were built.²³ Initially it was used as an air superiority fighter, a role later taken by the P-51 Mustang, an aircraft with better endurance and range. The P-47 could carry up to two 1,000 lb. bombs, and with its eight 0.50" cal. machine guns, it was an excellent aircraft for Close Air Support and air to ground missions in general, specially at short range.

The unit started operations with fifteen P-47 D aircraft, and was able to maintain around twelve operational aircraft at all times. Adequate training and integration in the US logistical system contributed to these numbers, in spite of losses. Spare parts were available and the 58th Fighter Group retained the P-47 aircraft, while other units changed to the P-51. Access to higher level maintenance facilities, also contributed to the Squadron operational status. However, there were some limitations.

The Limiting Factors

Several factors affected the training. The time necessary for preparation and the language barrier were critical. Weather in the US and in the SWPA was a factor that caused delays and imposed restrictions. The equipment of the unit as a whole also required a great amount of effort.

After the 201st Squadron program started, time for training was critical if the unit was to be sent to combat. The original training plan contemplated that the Squadron would be ready in November 1944; however, more realistic estimates indicated five months of training. It took over seven months before the unit was ready to leave the US, and the training was not completed as established in the program, due mainly to weather.²⁴

Weather played an important role in the delay of the MEAF training. The Squadron suspended unit training in Pocatello, Idaho due to weather; it had to move, together with the American classes training at Pocatello, to Majors Field, TX. Weather also affected gunnery training at Brownsville Field, TX. Even in the SWPA flying training was delayed because of weather.

Language was probably the biggest barrier for pilots and ground personnel, and English classes were added to the training program. The instructors of Section "I" agreed that "The chief difficulty in the training of Mexican personnel was the language difference. This was a particular handicap in the on-the-job training program. Results were not completely satisfactory when the Mexican mechanics were put to work with the base mechanics." The interpreters of Section "I" at Pocatello and Majors Field were a great help. "Some considered that training at Farmingdale (Republic Aviation Corp.) was not as

beneficial as training on the line, due to inability of interpreters to speak sufficient Spanish.”²⁵

The language difference also affected pilot training, and probably flight safety. One fatal training accident in the US was probably due to communication problems. A pilot died during a take-off accident, when after receiving clearance to use the runway attempted to get airborne on a short taxiway. The tail wheel and the big engine on the P-47 diffculted forward visibility on the ground. One pilot was eliminated during unit training for his limited knowledge of the English language; a problem that could not be solved completely even with bilingual instructors.²⁶ The “check sheet” for the ground training in the SWPA recommended: “Since only about 40% of the 201st Squadron personnel are English speaking, the use of posters, photos, maps and other visual aids is indicated. An interpreter will also be present to assist you in presenting your material.”²⁷

Most pilots agree that the P-47 was not an easy plane to fly. Marvin Bledsoe, a P-47 fighter pilot, mentions in his book *Thunderbolt* that several inexperienced pilots were killed in this aircraft, while others asked for transfers.²⁸ In addition to that, the very nature of combat training increases risk. One pilot died on air to air gunnery training, when the aircraft went out of control right after he made a firing pass on the target. It was never known if something hit him, but that is a possible cause. Another pilot died in the SWPA during combat training, attempting to recover a high speed stall after a dive bombing pass.²⁹

Maintenance during training was excellent, but the war requirements imposed sometimes to operate barely within safety margins. It is natural for a unit engaged in combat to retain the best aircraft, and give away war weary equipment. This is one

possible explanation for some of the accidents in P-47s “loaned” to the 201st Squadron in the SWPA. Three forced landings because of engine malfunctions happened from 21 to 24 May 1945. Flights stopped for a maintenance inspection, and some aircraft were replaced, reducing the accident rate.³⁰ Sometimes it was necessary to use “alternate procedures” to accomplished the mission, such as wood boxes or oil drums on top of dollies for loading bombs. During take-off and landing training of Mexican pilots at Napier Field, Alabama, it was necessary during the summer to water spray the old P-40 engines before take-off to allow sufficient cooling.³¹ These limitations highlight the operational performance of the MEAF.

Notes

¹History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 6 August 1944-1 February 1945, Majors Field, 72nd Fighter Wing, Second Air Force, 4.

²History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, August 1944-March 1945, Historical Section, Administration and Services Division, Headquarters, Second Air Force, 4-5.

³History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 6 August 1944-1 February 1945, 9.

⁴Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 37.

⁵History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, August 1944-March 1945, 9.

⁶Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 85.

⁷Among the interpreters were two WAC ladies born in Mexico. One of them became a US citizen to join the WAC in June 1944. History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 6 August 1944-1 February 1945, 5-6.

⁸History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 1 February-18 March 1945, 23, 26.

⁹History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 6 August 1944-1 February 1945, 11.

¹⁰History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, August 1944-March 1945, 11, 13, 15.

¹¹History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 6 August 1944-1 February 1945, 16.

¹²Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 110, 111.

¹³Ibid., 419-439.

¹⁴Preparations for the Mexican flag presentation ceremonies demanded a great amount of official attention from the 201st Squadron and Majors Field personnel. Because of the importance of this ceremonies gunnery training at Brownsville Field was

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interrupted. History of Majors Field for February 1945, 72nd Fighter Wing, Second Air Force, 3, 43.

¹⁵Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 212, 226.

¹⁶George C. Kenney, *General Kenney reports: A personal History of the Pacific War* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987), 544.

¹⁷Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 230.

¹⁸History of V Fighter Command, 1 April-2 September 1945, inclosure #41: Statistical report.

¹⁹History of V Fighter Command, 1 April-2 September 1945, inclosure #40: Training and Indoctrination of 201st Mexican Squadron.

²⁰The report that covered from 2400/14 May to 2400/15 May indicated "All fighter missions scheduled for today were cancelled due to bad weather." V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summary, Report # 136, 16 May 1945.

²¹Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 265.

²²White or dark painting of the P-47 aircraft was common to help identification, and distinguish from the German FW 190A and from the Mitsubishi Zero. Larry Davis, *P-47 Thunderbolt in action* (Carrollton, TX: Squadron/Signal Publications, 1984), 17.

²³*Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴Captain Castro indicates that all phases were covered in less time than programed. However, other sources show that the 120:00 hrs. program was not completed. Apparently, each pilot flew an average of 90:00 hrs. "Muchas de estas misiones no fueron realizadas por haberlo impedido el mal tiempo, sobre todo en lo referente al trabajo de conjunto." (Many of these missions were not accomplished because of weather, above all in relation to team work). Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 82.

²⁵History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, 6 August 1944-1 February 1945, 8-9.

²⁶Some instructors were selected because they had taken in high school one Spanish class; then, it was assumed they knew the language. Sometimes the communication procedure in flight was shaking the stick and a few words in Spanish (usually loud in dangerous situations). Lieutenant Charles H. Volz Jr., Interview, 30 December 1996.

²⁷History of V Fighter Command, 1 April-2 September 1945, inclosure #39: Check sheet.

²⁸Marvin Bledsoe, *Thunderbolt: Memoirs of a World War II Fighter Pilot* (New York, N.Y.: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, Inc., 1982), 21.

²⁹The 58th Fighter Group trained the 201st Squadron in the SWPA. This unit's bombing technique allowed excellent results thanks to a very steep dive angle. However, while praising steep dive angles, a note indicated not to try "steeper dives, thus lowering the safety factor." It must had been difficult for new pilots to judge the difference. History of the 58th Fighter Group, Chapter 19, May 1945, 4.

³⁰Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 263.

³¹In hot days, to allow engine cooling for take-off, a water pipe near the end of the runway sprayed the P-40s engines. Lieutenant Charles H. Volz Jr., Interview, 30 December 1996.

Chapter 4

Operational Performance

*Que los miembros de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana no olviden nunca el ejemplo de nuestros héroes. Que, en las pruebas que les reserva la guerra, sientan latir—al unísono con los suyos—los corazones de todos los mexicanos. Y que la bandera que les envió vuelva con ellos, desgarrada tal vez por las balas del enemigo, pero con gloria.***

—President Manuel Avila Camacho

The MEAF and the 201st Squadron were a force representing in the battlefield to the Mexican military; they represented them well. It was a small force that combated during a relatively short period of time. “But considering that the 201st was new to combat their record compares favorably with that of the veteran pilots of the 58th Group.”¹ The 201st Squadron flew fifty-nine combat missions in Luzon and Formosa, and several ferry flights in the SWPA.² There were inevitable losses; that was the price to pay for the honor of Mexico.

The Concept of Operations

Tactical and Operational concepts in the SWPA are unique in many ways. General MacArthur and General Kenney established a working relationship that enhanced the capabilities of ground, air, and maritime components in an unprecedented form among

Allied forces. Their success in integrating air and land forces' operations is comparable to the German's "Blitzkrieg" operational concept.

The Allied Strategy to defeat Japan required the reduction of the defense perimeter, expanded after the Japanese offensive in 1942. This strategy made unnecessary to recapture all the terrain in Japanese hands. Isolation of forces and use of forward operational bases were better in terms of cost and effectiveness. From these forward bases it was possible to employ tactical air power, to negate Japan its lines of communication. The War Zone Familiarization Manual for the SWPA presented this strategy as follows:

The pattern has been generally like this: An Allied air blockade is first spread out from our most advanced base. Japanese shipping is attacked with persistence until the enemy strong-points within the blockade area are sealed from their major feeder lines. Simultaneously our fighters seek out enemy planes wherever they are, particularly over the latter's bases and destroy them. Importunate, well rehearsed bomber missions follow into these bases and shoot for ships and airplanes. This continues until the enemy's capacity for air retaliation to a landing is minimized. Meanwhile only one or two of the numerous enemy coastal bases within the blockade area are selected for invasion. The Air Force is switched to ground support and turns its full fury on the infantry's target. Then comes the landing with the ground troops aiming for the airstrips. Engineers and malarial control units begin work immediately. Our Air Force moves forward and the process is then ready for repetition to the next limit of our fighters' reach, while by-passed bastions in the rear are kept impotent by isolation.³

In World War II, it was already accepted that Air Superiority was the initial task of air power. After it was achieved, some believed that strategic bombardment of "moral" or material objectives followed; others thought that isolation of the battlefield and support to ground forces was next. The characteristics of the SWPA favored the latter, that is, tactical air power was necessary, either to contribute in the destruction of the Japanese fielded forces to attain victory, or to permit forward bases for strategic air operations.

The Allied Strategy required a great degree of cooperation at the operational level. Not considering maritime forces, most of the time it was air power who supported ground forces, but also ground forces helped air power providing and defending air bases closer to the diffuse battle front in the Pacific islands. This was the concept that permitted tactical development in air-ground operations, and allowed an early invasion of the Philippines in Leyte Gulf, on October 20, 1944.⁴

When the MEAF arrived to the Philippines, Japanese forces still occupied an extensive part of Luzon and Mindanao. The Allied ground forces were in pursuit of the Japanese troops, but they were still a formidable force that continued fighting until the surrender of Japan.⁵ Enemy air activity over Luzon was very limited, but there were some isolated reports of hostile aircraft over Manila Bay in June.⁶ This was the general situation when the MEAF initiated combat missions on 4 June 1945.

The Luzon Operations

The 201st Squadron conducted 53 combat missions in Luzon, supporting Allied ground forces, from 4 June to 4 July 1945. Many operations were pre-planned missions to attack enemy concentrations or provide Close Air Support, but others were immediate missions from air or ground alert. Forty-five missions were effective, with a high percentage of bomb impacts in the target area. Many reports indicated good and excellent results.⁷ Eight of these missions were not effective due to different reasons. The History of the 58th Fighter Group mentions: "From the 7th to the 25th of June, the 201st flew 31 missions with the 58th Fighter Group. The results of the various missions ran the scale

from good to excellent, with the results of some missions not reported by SAP.” Appendix C contains mission information.

Coordination with ground forces was essential for this type of missions. The Support Air Party (SAP) concept in use for Allied forces in the SWPA was a refined aspect of the Air-Ground operations. It had evolved from experiences in previous operations, and all the general components of a modern CAS system were present. The 201st Squadron conducted many missions under SAP control, most of them with good results.

Weather was the most common cause for ineffective missions. Weather conditions in the Philippines during summertime are unpredictable. In general, there is a direct relationship observed between accuracy of impacts and weather conditions. However, sometimes the 201st Squadron attained good results dropping bombs in close formation due to bad weather. Occasionally, an alternate target was attacked due to weather conditions around the main target.

Target identification was also a factor for ineffective missions. Forests in the Philippines sometimes prevented target identification. Clearance was a requirement for attack, and it would only be granted after identification of the target. The available and unclassified mission reports of the V Fighter Command, 58th Fighter Group, and the 201st Squadron, do not indicate cases of fratricide during the Mexican missions. However, Lt Col Sandoval Castarrica wrote that on one occasion the SAP and the L-5 pilot (Forward Air Controller) designated the target with white smoke bombs and cleared the attack, indicating satisfactory results with all bombs observed impacting the objective area; later the V Fighter Command notified the attack affected American troops.⁸ The next two

flying days, pilots from the 58th Fighter Group replaced the American liaison pilots, and accompanied the Squadron's flights.

To facilitate target identification, a liaison aircraft (L-5) or ground controllers directed the attacking force. Lack of communication with these elements also added to non effective missions. These personnel gave mission results, and when foliage or distance did not interfere scoring most results were confirmed on target. When the Squadron aborted a mission for any reason, the pilots dropped their bombs on safety areas, usually over the sea.

Effective strafing required visual contact with the target. Not all missions involved strafing, but when it happened, results were also good. Some mission results mention secondary explosions and silenced machine gun nests. One daily report indicated: "The Mexican P-47s bombed and strafed enemy concentrations and motor convoy north of PAYAWAN on route # 4. All bombs were in the target area and two trucks were left burning. Accurate M/G fire holed two A/C."⁹ These reports testify the performance of the 201st Squadron in the SWPA.

The Formosa Operations

In the Philippines there was almost no enemy air activity. Japanese aviation had concentrated in the defense of Japan, and only sporadic flights were seen over the Philippines. There was some enemy air activity over Formosa (Taiwan), and the 201st Squadron received the opportunity to go after it from 6 to 9 July 1945.¹⁰

Four long range operations were launched over Formosa, to conduct Fighter Sweep missions. On two missions the pilots saw unidentified aircraft, possibly adversary, but

they were too distant and it was not possible to engage in air combat. On one occasion the enemy planes reversed direction, and both times they climbed into the clouds.¹¹ Some friendly flights were observed, and on one occasion a submarine was detected. Japanese submarines conducted resupply missions to forces isolated on some islands.

These missions did not destroy enemy adversaries, but allowed training for long range missions. After almost a month of training and aircraft ferry missions, the unit received another mission—to bomb Karenko, Formosa. Eight aircraft launched on 8 August 1945 for a long range mission that almost exceeded the aircraft capabilities. The pilots declared the mission non effective, but they did not have a second chance. The war ended on 15 August 1945.

The last mission of the 201st Squadron was to escort a convoy enroute to Okinawa, and it took place on 26 August 1945. The war was officially terminated, but there was the possibility of Kamikaze aircraft launching from Formosa. This was the final mission tasked to the 201st Squadron of the MEAF.

Operational Factors

When the MEAF arrived to the Philippines there was almost no Japanese air opposition, and the ground forces were retreating trying to reorganize. However, the adversary was still capable of inflicting damage, and at least on three missions aircraft were damaged from enemy fire. The P-47 was a rough airplane and no aircraft were lost due to enemy action.

Five Mexican pilots died and several accidents happened in the SWPA during non combat missions.¹² The first fatal accident overseas happened on June 1, 1945, apparently

for a high speed stall after a steep bombing dive. Another pilot died on June 5 when his P-47 crashed because of engine failure after take-off for a functional check flight. Apparently he attempted to avoid a bivouac area. One more fatal accident happened on July 16 during a ferry flight, when the pilot attempted to ditch on the sea after the engine quit due to lack of fuel, while trying to reach friendly territory flying wingman to an American Officer.¹³

Another fatal accident occurred in similar conditions on July 19, 1945. A two-ship flight encountered heavy weather and the leader was lost and never found. The final fatal accident happened on July 21, 1945. In the weather, a pilot flew to the ground in formation with his leader—an American officer.¹⁴ These losses severely affected the operational performance of the unit, and contributed together with other factors to prevent the Squadron from relocating to Okinawa.¹⁵

The short range of the P-47 also affected the operational performance. When the Squadron flew missions to Formosa, the aircraft limitations imposed severe restrictions. Loiter time in fighter sweep missions with no bombs onboard was about 20 minutes. With the aircraft loaded with bombs, the missions were critical.¹⁶ In the only mission to bomb Formosa, two aircraft had to land in an alternate field due to fuel shortage.

Another factor that combined with the others to affect the operational performance was the lack of replacements. They continued training in the US, and it would require more time for them to arrive to the SWPA and be ready for combat.¹⁷ In addition, some losses were leaders and it would require additional training to replace them.

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^{**} That the members of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force never forget the example of our heroes. That, in the tests that the war will present them, they feel to beat—at unison with theirs—the hearts of all Mexicans. And that the flag that I send them return with them, torn perhaps by the enemy's bullets, but with glory.

¹History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, July 1944-1 September 1945, Research Studies Institute, 5.

²The total number of combat missions mentioned in different sources varies from slightly above 40 to more than 50. However, they are 58 missions if we consider the combat missions from 4 to 6 June, where an average of 3.2 P-47s from the 201st Squadron flew integrated in the 58th Fighter Group formations. The other mission included took place after the Japanese surrender, to protect a naval convoy from Kamikaze attacks launching from Formosa.

³War Zone Familiarization Manual for the South West Pacific Area, February 1945, Compiled by AC AS, Training, AFTAC-2/20/45-15C, 3.

⁴For an excellent discussion of Air-Ground operations in the SWPA, see: B. Franklin Cooling, ed. *Case studies in the development of Close Air Support* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1990), Chapter 7.

⁵About 50,500 Japanese troops from the *Shobu Group* came out of the Luzon mountains after the end of the war. This force was roughly one third of the peak strength of over 150,000. The *Shobu Group* had about 65,000 men at the end of June 1945. Robert Ross Smith. *Triumph in the Philippines* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1993), 578-579.

⁶V Fighter Command, Air Raid Reports, Red Alert Report No. # 11, 17 June 1945.

⁷V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summary, June-July 1945, Reports # 155, 159, 167-169, 175-178, 181, 184, 189, 190.

⁸Tte.Cor.Sandoval Castarrica, 295, 296.

⁹V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summary, 18 June 1945, Report # 169.

¹⁰Enemy aviation in Formosa was estimated around 90 airplanes; about 65 fighters and the rest bombers. V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summary, 5 July 1945, Report # 186.

¹¹V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summary, 8-9 July 1945, Reports # 189, 190.

¹²Kenney, General George C., Commander Far East Air Forces. Letter. To Commanding General, Army Air Forces (Thru: Commander-in-Chief, AFPAC). Subject: Transmittal of Report of Lt Col A. W. Kellond, 24 June 1945, dated 9 September 1945.

¹³Tte.Cor.Sandoval Castarrica, 327.

¹⁴Ibid., 335-337.

¹⁵An American perception of difficulties in the functioning of the 201st Squadron was the interference of the MEAF Commander. "The Squadron Commander is in fact accountable to two superiors and the divided control has made it extremely difficult for him to carry out the missions which have been assigned to him." Kenney, General George C., Transmittal of Report of Lt Col A. W. Kellond.

Notes

¹⁶For more information on the P-47's limitations on long range missions, see: Stephen L. McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton. *To command the sky: the battle for air superiority over Germany, 1942-1944* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

¹⁷New supervisory personnel and shortage of P-47 aircraft in Majors Field, affected the training schedule of Mexican pilots. On 1 June 1945 class M.F. 7-28 was at 87 % complete; the Mexican group of the same class was at 48 %. Fighter Progress Chart-Flying Training Status, Class M.F. 7-28 and M.F. 7-28 MEX., 1 June 1945.

Chapter 5

Assessment and Conclusions

*Fue así como dejo de existir la FAEM, una fuerza de modestos efectivos que, con un mínimo costo en sangre y en dinero, en poco tiempo desarrolló una actividad visible en efectos materiales en el frente del Pacífico, haciendo realidad la voz de México en defensa de las libertades humanas al lado de las Naciones Unidas.****

—Tte.Cor. de E.M. Enrique Sandoval Castarrica

To assess the significance of the MEAF and the 201st Squadron, it is necessary to consider more than the simple participation in combat. Several aspects of the Mexican military benefited from the participation of this small but significant military force. Hence, the contributions of the MEAF can even be connected to emerging US-Mexico relations after World War II.

The MEAF Contribution

The analysis of the operational data presented in this research paper, gives indications of the overall performance of the MEAF in combat. The number of effective missions is clearly greater than the ineffective ones, and the mission reports indicate accurate bombing and strafing. When assessing the impact of the unit in the war, clearly it was not essential for the Allied victory, but this was never the purpose of the Mexican force. It was only a small unit representing the Mexican military, and it was immersed in a new combat arena

full of technical innovations, but it was fighting among friends and for a noble cause; this was important.

In spite of the losses in lives and material, the overall cost of the MEAF was not excessive. Perhaps the lack of combat experience and the conditions in the SWPA contributed to a relatively high amount of casualties and accidents. Probably they could have been avoided with better training, conducted without time constraints.

The MEAF program brought great political value. The people of Mexico united to receive and honor the returning MEAF personnel. Enormous groups of Mexicans gathered in US and Mexican cities to celebrate with the MEAF. They were part of the forces of liberation that fought against the oppressor and attained victory. Mexico's participation in combat overseas brought international prestige and strengthened US-Mexico relations.

Probably in the same way that the war contributed to better US-Mexico relations, the MEAF also contributed to better relations between the military of both countries. The MEAF program fully developed from start to finish, and it contributed to a greater degree of cooperation among the US and Mexican military.

This cooperation contributed significantly to the modernization of the Mexican armed forces. Some of the equipment acquired during World War II remained in the inventory for many years. Some trainer aircraft were still flying almost forty years after the MAF received them through the Lend-Lease agreement. The MAF also received some B-25 bombers after the war.¹ For a country with a reduced military budget, these were very important contributions.

The training of pilots in the US was another positive result of this cooperation. Some 201st Squadron replacements continued training in twin engine aircraft after the war finished. Many of them would later fly the transport and cargo aircraft of the MAF, fulfilling an important role during peace time. Also, some MAF pilots went on to civilian jobs in airline companies during the following years. This somewhat reduced capabilities of the armed forces but contributed to the development of Mexico's commercial aviation.

The pilots graduated from flight training centers in the US helped to improve the Mexican training programs. Since 1943 the MAF pursued a reorganization of its training centers.² The curricula, organization, and equipment of the Military Aviation School benefited from the coordination through the JMUSDC.

The MEAF also contributed personnel to senior leadership positions in the MAF. Colonel Antonio Cárdenas Rodríguez and Captain Roberto Salido Beltrán—the Commander and A-3 of the MEAF—would later become Chiefs of the MAF. Also, some 201st Squadron and replacement pilots would reach the rank of General. No doubt their combat experience benefited the MAF development. These are some of the contributions of the MEAF.

Conclusions

The participation of the MEAF in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) in World War II is an important aspect in the history of Mexico's Armed Forces. The organization, equipment, and operations of this force, successful in spite of many obstacles, offer valuable lessons. The development and performance of this force are an example of trust,

coordination, commitment, and cooperation between international allies for a worthy cause.

This research paper analyzed the organization, training, and operations of the 201st Squadron, and explained some aspects of the operational performance and contributions of the MEAF. The participation of this force in World War II was not an ordinary accomplishment, especially if we consider that this was the first occasion that Mexico's government sent forces to fight outside of the country's territory.

It is almost certain that Mexico's participation in the Second World War against the Axis powers will continue to be seldom mentioned in history books. Also, the support with raw materials and labor force to the Allied war effort aspect will continue to receive considerably more attention than the actual contribution in combat. A relationship that reflects the perceived overall contribution of the country to the Allied cause in World War II, but that not diminishes the action of Mexico's only unit participating in combat overseas—the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (MEAF).

The MEAF ceased to exist on December 1, 1945. This is what Lt Col Sandoval Castarrica registered about the event in his *Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana*.

That is how the MEAF ceased to exist, (it was) a modest force in numbers that, with a minimum cost of blood and money, in a short time performed a visible activity in material effects in the Pacific Front, turning into reality the voice of Mexico in defense of the human liberties together with the United Nations.³

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*** That is how the MEAF ceased to exist, (it was) a modest force in numbers that, with a minimum cost of blood and money, in a short time performed a visible activity in

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material effects in the Pacific Front, turning into reality the voice of Mexico in defense of the human liberties together with the United Nations.

¹Davila Cornejo, 39.

²Harper, Brig.Gen. Robert W., Asst.Chief of Air Staff, Trng., to Commanding General, Army Air Forces Training Command, Letter: Request for School Data for Mexican Air Force, 19 August 1943.

³Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 545.

Appendix A

Mexico-United States Agreement

The Governments of Mexico and the US signed an Agreement on January 1945, regarding the participation overseas of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron. The following is a transcription of the Agreement, as it appears on Lt Col Sandoval Castarrica's book.¹

“ ACUERDO A QUE SE HA LLEGADO ENTRE LOS GOBIERNOS DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS MEXICANOS Y DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMERICA, CON RESPECTO A LA PARTICIPACION DEL ESCUADRON AEREO MEXICANO DE PELEA 201, EN ULTRAMAR.

I.- Los Gobiernos de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y de los Estados Unidos de América, convienen en la participacion de un Escuadrón Aéreo Mexicano de Pelea, con el Ejército de los Estados Unidos, bajo las siguientes condiciones, en que convinieron el Gobierno Mexicano y el de los Estados Unidos:

1.- El Escuadrón Aéreo Mexicano de Pelea y personal mexicano adjunto será, para todos intentos y propósitos, manejado como una parte integrante del Ejército de los Estados Unidos, con las siguientes excepciones:

a).- **COMANDO:**

El Escuadrón Aéreo Mexicano de Pelea puede ser acompañado por un Jefe mexicano, cuyo grado no exceda al de Coronel, con un reducido grupo de ayudantes, Oficiales y Tropa, cuyas funciones se limitarán a aquellas relacionadas con la supervisión, enlace y administración. El Comandante táctico del Escuadrón Mexicano de Pelea, en realidad, será un Oficial mexicano, clasificado para mandar de acuerdo con los requisitos de las Fuerzas Aéreas de los Estados Unidos.

b).- **ADMINISTRACION:**

(1) La administración interior del personal mexicano será ejercida por un Oficial mexicano, y el personal sujeto a los reglamentos y códigos de las leyes militares mexicanas.

(2) En sus relaciones con el personal civil de la zona en que el personal del Escuadrón esté estacionado, en combate o en descanso, el Comando mexicano deberá

adoptar las modalidades y reglas actualmente en vigor, acatadas por el Ejército de los Estados Unidos bajo las mismas circunstancias.

(3) Oficiales de las Fuerzas Aéreas de los Estados Unidos pueden ser asignados, en misión de enlace, con el Escuadrón Aéreo Mexicano con el fin de facilitar las operaciones del Escuadrón.

(4) Si por alguna razón, el Comandante del Teatro de Operaciones lo estima conveniente, cualquier personal mexicano puede ser regresado a México.

(5) El Gobierno Mexicano proporcionará los reemplazos de personal que se requieran, a notificación hecha por las Fuerzas Aéreas de los Estados Unidos para su entrenamiento y envío a la unidad.

(6) Las comunicaciones oficiales entre el Escuadrón Aéreo Mexicano de Pelea, y el Gobierno mexicano, serán por conducto del Departamento de Guerra de los Estados Unidos.

(7) Para evitar confusiones, y por razones de seguridad, los aeroplanos del Escuadrón Aéreo Mexicano de Pelea llevarán las identificaciones regulares de los Estados Unidos. La insignia mexicana deberá inscribirse, además y su colocación sujeta a la aprobación del Comandante del Teatro de Operaciones.

c).- GASTOS:

(1) Los haberes, asignaciones, etc., de las tropas mexicanas fuera de los límites continentales de los Estados Unidos, se harán en dólares o en cualquier otra unidad monetaria utilizada por el Ejército de los Estados Unidos en la misma zona, y de acuerdo con la distribución establecida por el Gobierno Mexicano. Los fondos para este objeto serán proporcionados al Departamento de Guerra por el Gobierno Mexicano, a solicitud del primero. El adelanto inicial que hará el Gobierno Mexicano ascenderá a quinientos mil dólares (500,000.00). Los Oficiales Americanos, pagadores en los Teatros de Operaciones, recibirán las instrucciones convenientes para asegurar el pronto pago del personal mexicano en campaña.

(2). EQUIPOS Y ABASTECIMIENTOS:

Los artículos de ministración inicial para un Escuadrón de Pelea, clasificación S.E. T/O & E 1-27, serán proporcionados por los Estados Unidos con cargo al convenio de Préstamos y Arrendamientos, existente actualmente entre los dos Gobiernos, al límite de disponibilidad del equipo dentro de las prioridades operativas. Los artículos de reemplazo y mantenimiento para la unidad, se proporcionarán por medio de los conductos de abastecimiento normales de los Estados Unidos. El mantenimiento abarca artículos de ministración standard, incluyendo subsistencias y servicios proporcionados normalmente a la unidades de las Fuerzas Aéreas de los Estados Unidos. Todos los artículos de ministración inicial, los de reemplazo y mantenimiento, se cargarán de acuerdo con los procedimientos de Préstamos y Arrendamientos. “

Notes

¹Teniente Coronel de Estado Mayor Enrique Sandoval Castarrica, *Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana* (México, Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1946), 151-154.

Appendix B

Flight Training Program

The Standard Second Air Force Flying program in the P-47 included five phases:

- Transition (13 missions)
 1. Transition
 2. Formation
 3. Navigation
 4. Acrobatics
- Pre-Gunnery (50 missions)
 5. Combat (Individual)
 6. Combat (Unit)
 7. Camera Gunnery
 8. Ground Gunnery
 9. Strafing
 10. Instrument
 11. Night transition
 12. Night Formation
 13. Low altitude navigation
 14. Combined training
- Aerial Gunnery (20 missions)
- Post-Gunnery - Unit training (16 missions)
- One hundred and fifty hour pilot (8 missions)
 15. High Altitude Combat
 16. Theater tactics

The program contemplated 107 missions and about 120:00 hr. to be conducted in about 12 weeks.¹

The Army Air Forces Training Standards covered were:²

1. Transition
2. Formation
3. Navigation
4. Acrobatics
5. Strafing
6. Rockets
7. Aerial gunnery
8. Night flying
9. Bombing
10. Instrument
11. Combat
12. Combined training
13. Chemical spraying
14. Theater tactics

Notes

¹Teniente Coronel de Estado Mayor Enrique Sandoval Castarrica, *Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana* (México, Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1946), 151-154.

²Fighter Progress Chart-Flying Training Status, Second Air Force.

Appendix C

Operational Data of the 201st Squadron

The operations of the 201st Squadron from June to August 1945 are representative of the missions usually flown by fighter units in the SWPA. According to the general military situation and the P-47's capabilities most missions were in support of ground forces. However, some missions were against the air adversary over Formosa, one was an Interdiction mission (Karenko bombing), and the last one was a Naval convoy escort mission. The unit also flew non combat training and ferry missions on combat zone.

The table below shows approximate combat missions data, based on the available 201st Squadron's Final Mission Reports.¹ The translation of the MAF Chief of Staff's report provided details about the initial operations.² Lt.Col. Sandoval Castarrica's book explained mission development.³ Measure of success was validated in most cases with the V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summaries.⁴ The History of the 58th Fighter Group was also consulted for this purpose.⁵

No.	Date	A/C	Mission	Target	Bombs	Rounds	Result
1	4-Jun	4	Alert	Aritao			Effective
2	4-Jun	4	Alert	Aritao			Effective
3	4-Jun	4	Bomb and strafe	Vwacs			Effective
4	4-Jun	4	Bomb and strafe	Vwacs			Effective
5	4-Jun	4	Bomb and strafe	Vwacs			Effective
6	5-Jun	4	Alert	Aritao/Dupax			Effective
7	5-Jun	4	Alert	Aritao			Effective
8	5-Jun	2	Direct support	Aritao			Effective
9	5-Jun	2	Alert	Aritao/Sto.Domingo			Effective
10	5-Jun	2	Alert	Aritao			Effective

11	6-Jun	3	Alert	Aritao		Effective
12	6-Jun	2	Alert	Bambang		Effective
13	6-Jun	2	Alert	Bambang		Effective
14	6-Jun	2	Direct support	Bambang		Effective
15	6-Jun	4	Alert	Bambang		Effective
16	6-Jun	3	Alert	Bambang		Effective
17	6-Jun	4	Alert	Bambang		Effective
*18	7-Jun	7	Bomb	Infanta	@	0 N/E
19	7-Jun	7	Bomb	Infanta	14	0 Effective
20	10-Jun	8	Direct support	Mariquina River	12	830 Effective
21	10-Jun	8	Direct support	Mariquina River	@	0 N/E
22	11-Jun	8	Air alert	Oscariz	16	540 Effective
23	11-Jun	5	Air alert	Oscariz	10	3,330 Effective
24	12-Jun	7	Air alert	Mariquina River	11	1,300 Effective
25	12-Jun	7	Air alert	Balete Pass	@	0 N/E
26	13-Jun	6	Direct support	Mariquina River	10	16 Effective
27	13-Jun	7	Air alert	Infanta	@	0 N/E
28	14-Jun	11	Air alert	Montalban	@	0 N/E
29	15-Jun	9	Bomb and strafe	Tuguegarao	14	480 Effective
30	15-Jun	9	Air alert	Antipolo	12	3,720 Effective
31	16-Jun	11	Air alert	Infanta	22	13,520 Effective
32	17-Jun	6	Bomb	Zolanga/Bambang	8	8,000 Effective
33	17-Jun	9	Bomb	Payawan/Bangang	14	6,900 Effective
34	18-Jun	8	Bomb	Lenatin River	16	4,360 Effective
35	18-Jun	5	Bomb	Lenatin River	10	6,180 Effective
36	19-Jun	6	Air alert	Antipolo	@	0 N/E
37	20-Jun	8	Air alert	Antipolo	16	5,260 Effective
38	20-Jun	7	Air alert	Antipolo	14	8,880 Effective
39	21-Jun	7	Bomb	Monte Malabito	14	7,886 Effective
40	21-Jun	7	Air alert	Ilagan	14	0 Effective
41	22-Jun	8	Bomb	Monte Malabito	16	7,136 Effective
42	22-Jun	9	Bomb and strafe	Agos River	17	8,732 Effective
43	23-Jun	8	Bomb	Antipolo	16	5,370 Effective
44	23-Jun	6	Bomb	Antipolo	10	1 Effective
45	24-Jun	6	Bomb	Kanan River	10	10,060 Effective
46	24-Jun	6	Bomb	Infanta	12	0 Effective
47	25-Jun	12	Bomb	Infanta	24	9,200 Effective
48	25-Jun	12	Bomb	Infanta	24	1 Effective
49	26-Jun	11	Bomb	Infanta	21	8,750 Effective
50	28-Jun	10	Bomb	Limutan	18	2,290 Effective
51	29-Jun	10	Bomb	Limutan	20	15,910 Effective
52	30-Jun	9	Bomb	Cervantes	@#	0 N/E
53	4-Jul	11	Air alert	Cervantes	0	0 N/E
54	6-Jul	8	Fighter sweep	Toko, Formosa	0	0 Effective
55	7-Jul	10	Fighter sweep	Toko, Formosa	0	0 Effective
56	8-Jul	10	Fighter sweep	Toko, Formosa	0	0 Effective
57	9-Jul	10	Fighter sweep	Toko, Formosa	0	0 Effective
58	8-Aug	8	Bombardment	Karenko, Formosa	6 **	0 N/E
59	26-Aug	20	Convoy escort	Route to Okinawa	0	0 Effective
411					252	138,652

* Mission number 18 (1-1) is the first mission lead by the 201st Squadron.

** Bombs in target area. The pilots declared it non effective.

@ Bombs dropped in safety area.

Fragmentation 160 lb. bombs. All other 1000 lb. and 500 lb. GP bombs.

Notes

¹Final Mission Reports, 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, June-July 1945.

²Translation of Mexican Air Force Chief of Staff report, Records of Mexican Expeditionary Air Force, 201st Squadron, 26 March 1946.

³Tte.Cor. Sandoval Castarrica, 265-344.

⁴V Fighter Command, A-2 Daily Intelligence Summaries, June-August 1945.

⁵History of the 58th Fighter Group, June-August 1945.

Glossary

CAS	Close Air Support
JMUSDC	Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission
MAF	Mexican Air Force
MEAF	Mexican Expeditionary Air Force
SAP	Support Air Party
SWPA	South West Pacific Area (Theater of Operations)

air alert. Air operations conducted over a specific area to maintain airplanes in the air available for attack of targets of opportunity, designated by the SAP.

direct support. Air operations against hostile targets in close proximity to friendly forces and which require detailed integration with the fire and movement of those forces. Similar to the actual Close Air Support (CAS).

fighter sweep. Air operations conducted in the adversary's territory to engage and destroy enemy aircraft.

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